

Remarks of  
the Honorable Henry A. Waxman  
Before the Grocery Manufacturers of America  
May 5, 1988

As Chairman of the Subcommittee on Health and the Environment, I receive many invitations to speak. After 9 years on the job, I still marvel at the enormity of the issues which the Subcommittee is responsible for, and the diversity of organizations interested in them. We have authority over Medicare and Medicaid; public health programs; biomedical research; food, drug and medical device regulation; and environmental protection through the Clean Air Act and the Safe Drinking Water Act. What unites this array of divergent issues is our responsibility for promoting and maintaining public health.

As you can imagine, with jurisdiction so broad, it is rewarding to find consensus among experts and Members of Congress on an issue. We all agree that whether faced with federal budget deficits or surpluses, we can not afford to treat diseases we can prevent.

Years ago, our mothers gave us the same advice. They told us that an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure. There is wisdom to be found in old adages. Updated in 1988, it could be said that pennies spent on self care are worth dollars spent on health care.

There is a new generation of Americans today who are following this advice. For them, good health is a driving motivational force.

They have made health clubs profitable businesses. They have put salad bars in fast food restaurants. They have elevated jogging to the level of a national passion. There is enormous public interest in personal fitness and diet. This trend is encouraging. It is not a fad - it is a permanent change in American life style.

We know self care activities pay off. Obesity can be prevented or controlled. Cardiovascular disease can be reduced through diet and exercise. Quitting or never smoking will dramatically reduce personal health risks. Diets rich in fiber and low in fat may reduce an individual's risk of cancer.

Good advice. If followed, we can have a stronger, healthier population. It certainly is good news to a federal budget beset by health-care costs.

### Self Care and Food Industry

Our new fascination with self care and health promotion has a direct impact on much <sup>of</sup> our nation's food industry and on your companies. Consumer demand is growing exponentially for more information about ingredients, nutritional value and the relationship of diet to good health. Public pressure is mounting for greater assurances of the safety and wholesomeness of our food.

With the exception of legislation involving pesticides, Congress has responded with remarkably little attention to food issues in the

last five years.

There are good reasons why our focus has been elsewhere. There are good reasons why that is going to change.

Other issues: Not Food

It will come as no surprise to you that I am quite critical of the Reagan health care agenda. The President has a habit of trying to shift responsibility for health care to other levels of government, or denying that health care needs are unmet. As a result, my attention has been on other matters.

- o We have seen an explosion in the number of Americans with no form of health insurance. Their ranks now total 37 million and counting. Their plight is well documented. Their fate is ignored. Senator Kennedy and I are trying to remedy the situation, at least for the 23 million people with part time jobs, with our mandated health benefits bill.

- o The AIDS epidemic races ahead, jeopardizing the lives of millions in this country and abroad. This country's public hospitals are near the breaking point. Employers, schools, and average citizens desperately seek guidance. The world's public health experts are declaring war on AIDS. The Subcommittee on

Health and the Environment has worked on bills on research, testing, counseling, treatment and confidentiality.

o By the year 2000, our rapidly aging population will present overwhelming new demands on our health care system that we are not prepared to meet. Catastrophic health care insurance, long-term care and home health care legislation consumes an ever increasing amount of our time.

### Food Issues

With these issues and more, we have not had the opportunity to undertake necessary oversight and legislative activities in the areas of food safety and food labeling.

In the last half of this year, and in the next session of Congress, I expect my Subcommittee will be far more involved.

### Pesticides

Of the concerns consumers have about food, pesticide residues are at the top of the list. EPA can talk all day about the risk and benefit assessments of potentially carcinogenic pesticides. The public is not listening; and they do not want to be accommodating.

They believe their request for a wholesome and plentiful food supply, free of dangerous pesticides, is within our control. They do

not want explanations. They want results.

Congress has tried to respond with the FIFRA legislation. Unfortunately, controversy and disagreements prevailed in 1986 and appear to have won again in this Congress.

It is my opinion that the current stalemate is the worst of all possible outcomes, especially for pesticide manufacturers, farmers and food companies. The public's confidence in the safety of our food supply is being tested.

Public trust and the bottom line of your financial statements go hand-in-hand. Your business interests are best served by a strong EPA implementing sound pesticide laws that restore confidence in the food supply.

### Preemption

I know that your primary concern with pesticides has been to preempt the states from setting different standards. From my discussions with state officials, it is clear to me that their involvement in regulating pesticides is in direct response to their perception of EPA as weak and not protective of public health. The Congressional debate over pesticides is highly visible to the states and the public. The longer we talk about pesticide reform, the greater the chance that you will face vigorous state action and public reactions like Proposition 65 in California.

### New Waxman Pesticide Bill

Many of you will remember the pesticide tolerance bills I introduced in 1984 and 1985. They amended the pesticide residue tolerance setting authority in the Food, Drug and Cosmetic Act. I chose not to act on those bills because FIFRA legislation was under active consideration. I had hoped the House Agriculture Committee would return to the 1986 FIFRA bill that passed the House and finish action on it. It now appears that they will not.

My concern about food use pesticides is too great to wait any longer for resolution of the many issues that prevent FIFRA reform from being considered. I will be introducing a comprehensive rewrite of the tolerance authority within two weeks.

The goal of this new bill is to enable EPA to efficiently administer a health-based standard for food-use pesticides. Under it, EPA will move quickly to resolve outstanding concerns about suspect pesticides without disrupting the food supply.

I know the members of GMA will be interested and involved in our deliberations on this bill. I welcome your input.

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### Food Labeling

In the last four to five years, many bills have been introduced on food labeling. Fat, cholesterol, sodium, fiber and nutrition

labeling, fast food ingredient labeling, low-calorie and low-fat labeling, irradiation labeling and health claims are some of them. I believe many of these measures are worthy, but I am concerned that we should not approach food labeling in a piece-meal way.

Many experts go beyond these bills and question whether current food labels provide the information that is most important to consumers. Many tell me that much of our current labeling is not even useful.

It is time for a comprehensive review. I am prepared to begin anew with the question - what do consumers need to know and how best is that information presented to them?

It is a major undertaking that will involve a series of hearings over several months. It is time to reexamine the value of our current requirements and to consider the appropriateness of new requirements.

Once again, I know GMA will have much to add to the debate and to any legislation.

#### Palm Oil bill

There is one labeling bill that is currently receiving extensive support in the House - H.R. 2148, the tropical oil bill. While the Subcommittee has not scheduled consideration of the bill, it is possible that we could take up the bill as a separate matter.

### Fish Inspection

There is another area of activity that will be new for the Subcommittee in the coming months - fish inspection.

Seafood consumption reached a record 14.7 pounds per person last year. In comparison to the extensive meat and poultry inspection systems we have, states and the FDA are doing virtually nothing to protect the public from microbiological or toxic contamination of fish.

The Wall Street Journal recently reported Louisiana's director of meat and seafood inspection as saying that many seafood plants on the gulf coast are "almost like dumps." FDA is well aware of the problems, but has little ability with its existing staff and budget to commit greater resources to fish inspection.

I am not prepared at this point to say what more needs to be done. I do know that oversight hearings are imperative.

### Conclusion

The new era of diet and fitness conscious Americans has given us yet another reason to evaluate our food safety and food labeling laws. They are telling us that with the right information they will take greater responsibility for their health. That is good news. If the federal government is to limit the health care expenditures of the future, we must respond accordingly.